

Report

Chiricahua National Monument

■ 1.0 Site Description

Chiricahua National Monument (Monument) is comprised of 11,985 acres in southeastern Arizona, approximately 120 miles south and east of Tucson, Arizona via State Highways 186 and 181. The Monument was established in 1924 as part of the Coronado National Forest to protect the natural rock formations known as the “the Pinnacles.” The Monument is significant in that it includes the only rhyolitic (pinnacles, spires, balanced rocks) rock formations of its kind in the world (see Figure 1) and is one of three NPS areas that contain elements of Madrean flora and fauna. A significant portion of the Monument (10,290 acres) is designated wilderness (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 1. Views of Chiricahua National Monument



Parking at the Monument totals approximately 190 spaces, but dispersed throughout. Major facilities at the Monument are described below.

- **Visitor Center** – The Visitor Center site is located approximately 1.5 miles inside the Monument boundary along the main Monument road. Located in an historic building, the Visitor Center serves both as a visitor interpretation, information, and orientation center and an administrative center. There are approximately 20 parking spaces at the Visitor Center, which are jointly used as a trailhead for the Rhyolite Canyon system of trails.
- **Faraway Ranch** – Faraway Ranch is listed as an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places and includes a furnished ranch house, several outbuildings, fences, pens, and corrals. This area has approximately 15 parking spaces.

Figure 2. Vicinity Map



Figure 3. Site Map



- **Buffalo Soldiers Monument** – West of the Faraway Ranch is the 1885-1886 encampment of the Buffalo Soldiers, a troop of black soldiers that fought in the “Indian Wars” of the Southwest. The area contains the remains of a monument the soldiers built to President James Garfield. This area has approximately six parking spaces.
- **Main Roadway** – The Monument roadway (Park Road Route 10) is an eight-mile scenic drive built in the 1930s. This road provides access to major sites within the Monument, but is inadequate for large recreational vehicles (RVs) due to its narrow width, lack of shoulders, and tight turning radii. The road provides access to Massai Point, Echo Canyon, and Sugar Loaf Mountain vista areas. The Echo Canyon area has 15 parking spaces, Massai Point has 13 parking spaces, and Sugar Loaf Mountain has 15 parking spaces.
- **Campground** – The Bonita Creek Campground, accessible from the main park road, is divided by Bonita Creek. Twelve of the 26 campsites are within the 100-year floodplain, and others could become isolated from the main roadway during a flood.
- **Trails** – The Monument has a 17-mile system of trails that lead to outstanding formations and viewpoints. Parking areas for trailheads are located along Park Road Route 10 at several locations, while the Monument is adjacent to the Colorado National Forest with its 250 miles of trail, the two systems are currently not connected.

The Monument is open seven days per week, 24 hours per day. The entrance fee of \$6.00 per vehicle or \$3.00 per motorcycle, bicycle, or person is collected from the entrance station daily from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In 1998 78,502 persons visited the Monument. Future visitation levels are expected to increase significantly due to the recent establishment of Kartchner Caverns State Park, located approximately 60 miles northeast of the Monument. Annual visitation to the new State Park is expected to reach 500,000 persons, resulting in a spillover effect that would increase visitation to the Monument. In the first portion of 1999, visitation to the Monument increased approximately 84 percent above 1998 levels.

The peak visitation period is from March through May. Daily visitation during peak periods is approximately 342 persons per weekday and 404 persons per weekend day. Most visitors arrive by private automobile, but approximately three percent of the weekend visitors and five percent of the weekday visitors arrive in RVs. There are two different typical day-visitors to the Monument: sightseers and hikers. Sightseers generally park for 30 to 60 minutes at the mountain vista parking areas (Massai Point and Echo Canyon), with hikers parking in these areas for longer periods of time, typically three to five hours.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

The Monument operates a hiker shuttle via an 11-passenger van that takes hikers from the Visitor Center, campground, or Faraway Ranch areas to trailhead destinations. Volunteer drivers operate the shuttle one to two trips per day and charge \$2.00 per passenger. In 1998, the existing hiker shuttle made approximately 292 trips and transported 1,580 persons.

According to the Chiricahua National Monument Transportation Study, which was prepared in August 1999, ridership has been “steady and increasing.” The majority of the shuttle riders stay in the Monument campgrounds, with approximately 40 percent being day-visitors.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs identified in the 1999 Transportation Study for the Monument include the following:

- Short-term (Phase I) expansion of the existing hiker shuttle system. This consists of operation of two vans to transport passengers from Faraway Ranch and the Visitor Center to either Massai Point or Echo Canyon trailheads. The van, operated by the NPS personnel, interns, or volunteers, would operate in a continuous loop at 45-minute frequencies. This shuttle system would begin at 7:00 a.m. and run to approximately 11:00 a.m. or longer, depending upon demand. Passenger stops would include the Visitor Center, Faraway Ranch, the campground, Massai Point, and Echo Canyon. The 1999 Transportation Study estimate of capital costs for the Phase I shuttle expansion is \$470,000 over 10 years.
- Mid-term expansion (Phase II) of the existing shuttle system. A double loop shuttle system using four vans would be implemented if daily visitation levels were to reach 525 persons. In Loop One, visitors would be transported between the Monument entrance, Visitor Center, Faraway Ranch at 10-minute intervals using two vans. In Loop Two, visitors would be transported between the Visitor Center, Echo Canyon and Massai Point at 35-minute intervals using two vans.
- Long-term expansion of the shuttle system. If average daily visitation were to exceed 625 persons, the vehicles would use alternative fuels and larger vehicles would be used.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

There is a significant parking problem at the vista parking areas during both the spring and fall visitation periods. Parking demand ranges from 127 to 238 percent of capacity, resulting in many visitors parking illegally. The shuttle service is viewed as a necessity to reduce parking requirements at the vista parking areas. The shuttle system would reduce the number of visitors parking for longer periods, providing additional spaces for sight-seers who park for shorter periods (30 to 60 minutes).

In the longer term, implementation of the expanded shuttle system would enable Monument staff to close some roads and transport visitors entirely by the shuttle system. The proposed second loop would facilitate operation of parking areas and a Visitor Center

outside the Monument entrance, reducing and even eliminating visitor vehicle traffic within the Monument.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

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■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Alan Cox, Superintendent, Chiricahua National Monument